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The American Institute of Sacred Literature

A PROFESSIONAL READING COURSE ON THE EFFICIENT CHURCH

An unexpanding church is growing senile; a Christendom that is indifferent to non-Christian races is on the verge of decline. Indifference on the part of the church to the world, however, was never less imminent than today. Individual Christians may be indifferent to the non-Christian world, but the church is increasingly alive with missionary zeal. A careful study of the volumes mentioned under our present general topic will make this fact more than evident. Any inquiries may be addressed to the AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF SACRED LITERATURE or to the author of the articles in this particular course, PROFESSOR SHAILER MATHEWS.

It is difficult to realize that foreign missions in any modern sense of the word are only a trifle over one hundred years old. Of course there were missionaries, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, prior to the Moravians and William Cary, but missions as a general movement of the Christian church supported by organizations and having at their disposal vast sums of money are one of the greatest developments of modern Christianity.

Yet, strangely enough there is no subject in which it is more difficult to interest the members of many a local church. They recognize in a general sort of fashion the obligation resting on the church as a whole to carry the gospel to every creature, but their support is too often perfunctory and their contributions conventional. No church can be in the completest sense of the word efficient until it has got some sort of vision of its world-wide mission. In itself it may be feeble and unable to furnish either missionaries or money for missionary purposes, but it can at least sympathize with and catch the enthusiasm that springs from the movement of Christendom as it proceeds to bring the world to the feet of Jesus Christ.

It is only as we become loyal to great causes that we ourselves become great. Foreign missions are not the only service in which Christian men can engage, but they are at least one. In point of sacrifice to the average church member foreign missions may represent less than

that which comes from the attempt to reorganize the social order in the midst of which one lives; but there is plenty of sacrifice for the Christian who cuts the bands which bind him to those at home and moves off into a region which, whatever compensation it may offer in the way of opportunity, demands unusual devotion to one's highest ideals and the exercise of unusual faith.

It is a question how long any individual church can maintain itself without sharing in the tidal force of a missionary undertaking. We have long since passed the days when missionary activity was uniformly that of adventure. Adventures there still are in certain fields, but in the development of the last few years missions are becoming so organized as to resemble more the extension of the religious aspects of a civilization than an attempt to convert men and women away from a godless and doomed society. It is well that churches should understand this great change and appreciate that foreign missions are not an attempt to rescue some souls here and there from hell, but rather to save individuals, communities, and nations through the preaching of Jesus Christ.

Church efficiency involves the education of church members in this all-embracing conception of missions. A notable contribution to the philosophy, if it may be so called, of the missionary movement is a volume by Professor W. O. Carver, *Missions and Modern Thought*. The general purpose of the book is to set forth, not only the significance of missions to the world, but the position of missions in what may be called a general theory of Christian history. Professor Carver is fully aware of the objections to which missions are open from the point of comparative religion and an agnostic culture, and he discusses these matters urbanely but yet vividly. If one wants a general treatment of missions as a whole that is neither so elaborate as to be burdensome, nor yet so compressed as to be a bare outline, he cannot do better than to read this volume. Pastors particularly will find it helpful in giving a wide view of the entire group of problems which missionary activity raises.

A volume of rather more concrete quality and written rather from the point of view of the missionary than from that of the student of modern thought and society is Robert E. Speer's lectures on *Christianity and the Nations*. The volume falls into six parts: "The Missionary Duty and Motives"; "The Missionary Aim and Method"; "Missions and the Native Churches"; "Missions and Politics"; "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions"; "The Relation of Missions to the Unity of the Church and the Unity of the World." This list of topics shows at once not only sweep of the treatment, but also practical insight.

Written as the book was during the course of a visit to missions in South America it carries something of the spirit of the missionary himself. Particularly significant is Mr. Speer's treatment of the motives for missionary activity. These apply not only to the young man or woman who goes to the foreign field, but quite as truly to the churches themselves. "The supreme argument for foreign missions is not any word of Christ's—it is Christ himself, and what he reveals and signifies." Thus on the very first page of his treatment Mr. Speer sweeps the missionary enterprise clear from any absolute dependence on the so-called "great commission." Without denying the authenticity of the words he would have the church feel that it goes into the missionary activity, not in the spirit of legalism, but in that of co-operation with the saving God. In other words, that the church has in its possession a power of salvation which it owes to the world. In the development of this point of view Mr. Speer makes happy use of consular reports and the opinions of Sir H. H. Johnston and Lord Cromer.

In the treatment of missionary aims and methods the busy pastor can find a large amount of material which he can bring to his people with the conviction that he is not only interesting them in missions, but is educating them into a knowledge of what missions are really trying to do. Take, for example, the very practical question for the home church, as to how many of the elements of our western civilization should be carried into the non-Christian world in the process of evangelization. Mr. Speer discusses this matter at some length and not without sympathy with the social aspect of religions. But the aim of foreign missions, he declares, is to make Christ known to the world with a view to the salvation of individuals and their organization into native churches; it is not the civilization of the world, it is not changing the habits of men's lives or enlarging their knowledge, it is not even the conversion of the world. He regards the foreign-missions enterprise as something different from the ordinary work of the church as such. When the church is established the mission enterprise moves on. With this modification his discussion is not open to all the objection which at first it arouses. According to Mr. Speer the missionary movement is essentially evangelistic and the work of the church is transformation of social forces. A complete success on the part of foreign missionary work would make it as unnecessary as it is now in England or America.

But is not this view imperfect? To make Jesus Christ known to the world seems to be something vastly greater than the mere saving of individuals or establishing churches. Christ is not known to the world

until civilization is Christian and if this is not one of the aims of foreign mission work, we are greatly mistaken. At the same time we should agree with Mr. Speer that the religious and evangelical note should be primary and persistent, and at all events it is worth while to understand the force of Mr. Speer's position and to remember that he distinguishes between what he calls the aim of missions and the total purpose of Christianity.

In his discussion of the relation between missions and the native churches Mr. Speer expands the fundamental idea that "the aim of foreign missions is to plant Christianity indigenously in the life of each nation, to domesticate it there and let it grow up and out in forms of life appropriate to it in the new environment to which it has been naturalized so far as it has been presented in its true character of the universal life and faith of man." Such a view seems to us to be decidedly statesman-like. We ought not to superimpose the peculiarities of our religious development upon the Orient. Why, for instance, should a Hindu become a Scotch Presbyterian or a Northern Methodist. Civilization must ultimately have a part in the development of these native churches and it is essential that the new churches be national rather than foreign. At the same time the immediate problems which are involved in such a view are very many. What, for example, shall be the relation of the native church to the foreign church? Why have the churches of Bengal, for example, not sooner become self-supporting? Might it be desirable for the mission to abandon a foreign field as soon as a church is established and thus develop the native church through a feeling of responsibility? Such questions Mr. Speer discusses fully and with frank recognition of the barrenness of results independent of the native Christian. But always he returns to his primary policy, the establishment of a true national church.

Such a point of view leads to a discussion of missions in politics and of those delicate questions which rise from the presence of foreign missions in native states. What shall be the relation of the government, which wants trade with the nation, to the missionary to its people? How much military protection shall be assured them? How far should limits be set to missionary activity by treaty? Such questions must sooner or later be answered and a church will grow more sympathetic with the problems of the mission field if they are discussed at home.

Mr. Speer's discussion of Christianity and non-Christian religions might be summed up in the statement that the non-Christian religions have nothing to add to Christianity but very much to teach us. Indi-

viduals in non-Christian nations are better than their religions. Doubtless Mr. Speer's position here in this chapter will give rise to difference of opinion, but it is at least worthy of consideration as a frank treatment of a great subject. Mr. Speer is not thoroughly convinced that the non-Christian religions are altogether preparatory to Christianity, because of his rightful sensitiveness to their errors, but he would hold that the attitude of Christianity toward the foreign nation should recognize whatever good there is in non-Christian religions, but without compromise. The Christian missionary should frankly recognize the difference between Christianity and the non-Christian faiths. Christianity is not one among many religions of approximately equal worth, but the one supreme religion for salvation.

It is only to pursue the practical position taken by Mr. Speer a little farther to pass to the important volumes which make up the World Missionary Conference Reports in 1910. With two of these we are particularly concerned, that which contains the *Report and Discussion upon the Home Base of Missions* and that which presents the *Report of the Commission upon Co-operation and Unity*. Both volumes are extraordinary collections of material. Anyone who wishes to know just what is being done in the home field to stimulate interest in foreign missions will find it in the former volume, and those who wish to know precisely how far the tendency toward Christian unity has proceeded in the foreign field will find it in the second. To read these volumes is to come as near as one can through literature to an actual understanding of concrete situations. The pastor will find in them the sort of material that he needs to instruct the church as to practically every problem of method and of missionary progress toward unity of Christian life.

ADDITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

- James Shepard Dennis, *Christian Missions and Social Progress*.
 Edward Judson, *Life of Adoniram Judson*.
 Margaret E. Burton, *The Education of Women in China*.
 Edward A. Ross, *The Changing Chinese*.
Students and the Modern Missionary Movement (Report of the Rochester Convention, 1910).
 Weale, *The Conflict of Color*.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Should the task of evangelizing the non-Christian world be divided among different denominations?

2. Would the theology of Chinese Christians likely be the same as that of Hindu Christians?
3. Should missionaries found schools, or only churches? What do you think of this alternative?
4. How much does it cost to send a dollar to the support of a missionary station?
5. How do you account for the indifference of churches to foreign missions?
6. If you have a son, would you like him to be a foreign missionary? Why?
7. What are the statistics of the growth of Christianity in Africa, Korea, Japan, India?